

Public Health Fact Sheet

Haemophilus Influenzae Type B (Hib)



What is Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) disease?

Until recently, Hib was one of the most important causes of bacterial infection in young children. Hib may cause a variety of diseases such as meningitis (inflammation of the coverings of the spinal column and brain), blood stream infections, pneumonia, arthritis and infections of other parts of the body.

Who gets Hib disease?

Hib disease can occur in any age group. Due to widespread use of Hib vaccine in children, very few cases of Hib are reported each year in the United States. Hib is diagnosed more often in the elderly, unimmunized children and people who are immunocompromised.

How is Hib disease spread?

Hib disease may be transmitted through contact with mucus or droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person.

What are the symptoms of Hib disease?

Symptoms may include fever, lethargy, vomiting and a stiff neck. Other symptoms depend upon the part of the body affected.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The incubation period for Hib disease is unknown, but is probably less than one week.

When and for how long is a person able to spread Hib disease?

The contagious period varies. Unless treated, it may be transmitted for as long as the organism is present in the nose and throat, even after symptoms have disappeared.

Does past infection with Hib disease make a person immune?

Children who had Hib disease when younger than 24 months of age may be at risk of getting Hib disease again. Children and adults who had Hib disease when 24 months of age or older are likely to be immune.

What is the treatment for Hib disease?

Antibiotics are generally used to treat serious infections. Rifampin is used in some circumstances as preventive treatment for persons who have been exposed to Hib disease.

What are the possible complications associated with Hib disease?

If Hib meningitis occurs, a certain proportion of those who recover may suffer long-lasting neurologic problems. In some instances, cases may be fatal.

What can be done to prevent the spread of Hib disease?

All children should be immunized with an approved Hib vaccine beginning at two months of age.